

## **Winner Takes It All by Luddleston**

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**Summary:**

Thanatos and Zagreus have always been competitive, ever since they were children racing one another around the House of Hades.

Five contests Zag loses and one he wins.

## Winner Takes It All

### Author's Note:

- For [oclear](#).

I have been so psyched to share this! Childhood friends to lovers is my JAM so it was great to write some for this exchange <3 plus, it was way too fun coming up with all the competitions they'd make up as kids.

"Okay, let me go first."

"That's not fair! What if you wake him up and then we have to wait for hours and *hours* for him to go to sleep before I can try?"

"I won't wake him up."

"Yes, you *will*."

Zagreus pouted as Thanatos crept closer to the mountain of red fur and sharp claws that was currently occupying the space to the side of Father's desk. All three heads were snoring, which was the best time to attempt to pet Cerberus, although Zagreus had been unsuccessful on any try so far.

That wasn't because he woke Cerberus, though. That was because Father was always stopping him. *Don't bother the dog, boy.*

Zagreus had tried to argue that petting wasn't bothering, but Father wouldn't hear it.

Today-or-night, Zagreus had been lucky. For reasons that had not been deemed necessary to relay to children, Father had gone out, which meant Cerberus was left alone and unguarded. So much dog to be petted. And Zag had challenged Thanatos to a competition: who could pet Cerberus most before he woke up and tried to eat them?

Cerberus was sleeping with his faces to the wall, which meant Thanatos had to creep around the backside of the desk to pet—and gave Zagreus plenty of time to sneak up behind Cerberus. Obviously, he wanted to pet one of the giant cute faces, but he would settle for the sleek fur on Cerberus' back instead.

Closer, closer. Zagreus had been called "the loudest thing in the Underworld" by his very irate father on more than one occasion, but he desperately tried to quiet this once. He didn't even breathe. He couldn't see how far Thanatos had progressed, the desk being almost twice his height and Cerberus being just as massive. Thanatos, of course, had no audible footsteps either, because he was floating. By Zag's estimation, Than was approaching petting territory.

Maybe Zagreus could get 'round him this way, and he could pet the head on the left while Than pet the head on the right. That seemed fair. Just a few more steps. Zagreus kept his eye on his prize, the enormous fluffy ear he was determined to give Cerberus scratches behind. Five more steps, maybe.

Four...

Three...

When Zagreus set his foot down, Cerberus gave a startled yelp, and a lot of things happened at once.

Zagreus jumped off of his tail, feeling horrible for having accidentally trodden on it, and shouted an apology that was lost in the cacophony of three heads barking.

Thanatos made a very high-pitched squeal he would deny ever making and disappeared in a flash of green, reappearing halfway down the hall to the Pool of Styx.

Cerberus barked loud enough to wake every shade in Tartarus.

"I'm sorry, boy!" Zagreus said again, reaching out to touch the side of Cerberus' face and only realizing belatedly that action was a good way to

get one's arm bitten off.

His arm was not bitten off, however.

Instead, Cerberus whined, leaning into the touch, allowing Zagreus to sink his hand fully into the thick crimson fur. His tail, which Zagreus realized was burnt at the end, started wagging, and a wet, vibrantly yellow-green tongue lolled out of his leftmost mouth and he made a rumbling noise that, while soul-shaking, sounded... pleased?

"Oh," Zagreus said, reaching up to scratch underneath Cerberus' chin. He had to go up on his tiptoes to do it. "You're a good boy, aren't you?"

"Why did you try and *singe his tail with your feet?*" Thanatos hissed, still hanging back.

"I didn't! You probably woke him up anyway."

Cerberus licked the side of Zagreus' head and made his hair stand up even more than usual.

"That was *not* my doing." Thanatos folded his arms.

"I think only this head likes being petted." Zagreus reached for the middle one and the left head intercepted him, bumping into his hand for even more pets. "I didn't mean to hurt your tail, boy, you forgive me, right?"

Cerberus snuffled happily into Zagreus' shoulder.

"See? He loves me! We're best friends now, and I win."

"This wasn't a contest," Thanatos argued, which was a thing he said when he lost a contest.

Zagreus opened his mouth to tell Thanatos that, yes, it *was* a contest, and he'd *won*, when a booming voice that was even more terrifying than Cerberus howling filled the hall.

"*Boy! What are you doing to the dog!?*"

— — —

The House of Hades was, at most times, a quiet and somber place, wherein the ruler of the Underworld held court and shades came forth in a penitent bow to make their case. Much paperwork was done, much serious conversation was had, and all of it was extremely professional and businesslike, and not at all prone to being interrupted by children running through the Great Hall.

Well.

It used to be so.

And then Zagreus started challenging Thanatos to races around the House, and everything was much more fun and interesting and sometimes they ran straight through a shade or two but the shades never seemed bothered for long. Father shouted, Achilles tried not to laugh, and Nyx just calmly floated out of their way.

This time, Zagreus was especially pleased, because he was *winning*.

Thanatos had been held up trying not to run headlong into Dusa, and he was still lagging behind even as they exited the main foyer and raced up into the halls, where the personal quarters of all those who lived and worked in the House were located. Their goal was the balcony at the end of this long stretch of hallway, and Thanatos had just barely made it up the stairs while Zagreus was already passing Hypnos' bedroom.

He laughed, and looked over his shoulder at Thanatos chasing him down. "Didn't know you were so slow, Than!"

"Zagreus! You little—"

"Enjoy listening to my father talk about proper behavior!"

The prize was as follows: whoever lost had to hide the winner and take the lecture from Hades on his behalf. Zagreus had lost so often he could

practically recite Father's admonishment word for word: *this House is not a place for children to run about*, blah, blah, blah.

He imagined the chagrined look on Than's face as he, the perfect child who was never in need of discipline, found himself the wrongdoer for once.

The door to the balcony was just ahead, the curtains pulled back, the view of the depths of Tartarus spread out before anyone who looked over the edge.

The flash of light from behind him nearly made him stumble, and the reappearance of Thanatos in front of him *did* make him stagger to a halt.

"Than! Hey!"

Thanatos crossed through the door and onto the balcony, turning around and giving Zagreus an absolutely devilish grin.

"Looks like you'll be the one listening to your father today," Thanatos said, leaning against the door to the balcony and holding up a hand when Zagreus reached out to smack him.

"That's cheating! You can't blink your way to the finish line!"

"No it isn't." Thanatos pushed on his shoulder, putting Zagreus out of range of hitting him again. "I didn't blink any further than you can. It's not cheating if you could just as easily have done it."

"It is if we didn't say beforehand that we could use magic!" Zagreus launched himself at Than, about to tackle him, but Thanatos intercepted his attack, pushing Zagreus backward until both of them tumbled onto the rug lining the hall.

"It was implied!"

Zagreus shoved Thanatos off him and tried to sit upon him until he admitted that he was cheating, but Thanatos floated out of his grasp. "Okay, now *that's* cheating!" Zagreus seized him around the waist and used all his body

weight to drag Thanatos back down, while Than attempted to kick him and just continued floating higher, pulling Zagreus with him.

Zagreus' feet weren't even touching the floor anymore when telltale heavy footsteps echoed up the staircase. If they hadn't gotten into this argument, the winner (Zagreus) would have already been hidden away, unable to see Hades coming down the hall and looking even angrier than usual.

Both of them fell to the ground in a heap as soon as Thanatos noticed Hades.

"What, in all this realm, do you two think you are doing?"

Looks like they were both in for the lecture, this time.

*"I hate that your father always blames you for leading me into your shenanigans," Thanatos told him, after the echoes of Hades lambasting them had finally finished ringing in their ears. "You want to talk about something being unfair, that's it."*

*"I usually am the one who comes up with the ideas for these things, though. I don't mind him blaming me. I'd rather you not get in trouble."*

*"Yes, but I go along. Willingly."*

*"Will you go along willingly if I ask you to race me back down?"*

*"Of course."*

— — —

"I'm bored," Zagreus announced, even though that much was obvious from the way he was lying on Thanatos' bed with his head hanging over the side, so that he stared upside-down at Thanatos.

"I couldn't tell," Thanatos replied drily from where he was seated right-side-up on the armchair, a book open on his lap.

"I'm always bored here. Especially with you gone all the time for work, now. You're still young, why do you have to go to work?"

"I'm Death. People need me, apparently. And I'm not young. We're practically adults." He could pretend he was still reading, but he was looking over the top of the page at Zagreus.

Zagreus laughed. "Practically adults. My voice still cracks on every other word, and yours is as high-pitched as it's always been." He kicked his feet, knowing he wouldn't burn through Than's bedsheets, as, given the trait both King and Prince possessed, most of the Underworld was fireproof. "Think of something to do before all the blood goes to my head. Quick, it already hurts."

"Sit up, Zagreus."

"*Than*," he whined, and Thanatos blinked across the room until he was sitting on the bed astride Zagreus, and pulling him up by the neck of his tunic. Zagreus let his head loll back, still groaning. "Is it possible to die of boredom? I'm sure someone's done it before."

"Want to look at Hypnos' list and say uncharitable things about all the ways mortals manage to be mortal? I know you usually do that with Meg, but..."

That particular activity usually involved them sniggering over people who died of anything preceded by 'erotic,' which Zagreus did not think Thanatos would find so amusing. "Let's just prank Hypnos, that's always diverting."

"He just falls asleep when you startle him. He's like a fainting goat," Thanatos complained.

"A fainting what?"

"Never mind."

"You're right, though," Zagreus sighed, slumping back and not even bothering to push Thanatos off of him. He'd shifted forward far enough that



his head was at the edge of the bed, now. "It is particularly boring when he falls asleep."

Thanatos moved, now that he was no longer worried that Zagreus was going to hurt himself (this is what Zagreus assumed, after all, Thanatos was always concerned for him) and was about to return to his book, when he paused, turning the volume in his hands instead. "Hey, Zag," he said, with a kind of grin that only somebody who was about to really irritate their sibling could wear. "Let's see how much stuff we can stack on him while he's asleep."

"Absolutely, yes, let's."

That was how they ended up in the corner of the Great Hall where Hypnos was supposed to be doing his work and was instead sleeping in midair, his cloak pulled around himself like a warm blanket. Father was out and the only beings around were the queue of shades Hypnos was supposed to be diverting, which meant they didn't require quite as much stealth, but Zagreus did try to make sure that his armful of books and trinkets he'd hauled from his bedroom didn't clatter as he deposited them on the floor. It wouldn't do if Hypnos woke before they had a chance to put anything atop him.

He was in a good position for it, lying with his back to the ceiling and his legs tucked up under himself, just a little fluff of snowy-white hair peeking out from under his quilted cloak-blanket. Zagreus set the first book on his back. Even his snores didn't disturb it, so they'd be fine as long as Hypnos didn't move in his sleep.

"Do you think these will weigh him down and he'll stop floating?" Zagreus asked in a whisper, setting the first book onto Hypnos' back and noticing no such effect.

"If you can't weigh me down, then no." Than went next, nudging his book so that the corners met up with Zagreus' perfectly.

"Are we betting on how many we can stack up before we wake him?" Zagreus sat another book, a thinner volume this time, atop Than's.

"Too experimental. It could be anything." Thanatos' next item was a little wooden box, long and flat, with the symbol of the House of Hades carved into the top.

Zagreus mostly had more books. "I bet eight."

Thanatos was easily swayed. "Fine. I bet twelve."

"Closest without going over?"

"Sure."

Hypnos' snores ceased for just a second as Thanatos extended yet another book, and he paused with his hand hanging in midair, probably regretting taking the higher bet. Hypnos resumed his deep slumber, however, and Thanatos managed to place his next item.

And then another.

And another.

The two of them stared up at a tower tall enough that Zagreus could no longer reach to put anything else on top. There were eighteen books atop Hypnos, along with that little wooden box of Than's, a jewel-encrusted bowl that belonged to Cerberus, and Zagreus' laurel wreath. At the very top, Thanatos had just placed Mort, hissing through his teeth as the tower wobbled but breathing a sigh of relief when it settled.

"We don't have anything else to stack," Zagreus said. "I don't think he's waking up."

"And we both went over, so the bet's off." Thanatos folded his arms and leaned down, peering at Hypnos' face.

"Want to go get Meg and show her?"

Than shrugged. "Sure. Maybe she has something else we can put on top."

"Ooh, yeah! Her thingy—that thing that holds up her ponytail, we could put that on Mort's head." Zagreus turned, headed for the lounge, where Meg had been on break when he'd run past to grab a pile of things to stack atop Hypnos.

"And she's taller than you, so she can probably reach the top," Thanatos said, following after him.

Zagreus elbowed him in the side. "Rude. I'm not short, I'll be as tall as Father someday. Taller, even!"

The resounding crash from behind them made both of them jump, Zagreus reaching out and grabbing Than's arm instinctively. Thanatos shook him off, and they turned, realizing that Hypnos had rolled over in his sleep and everything had come tumbling down. Surrounding him was a pile of books and trinkets, Mort sitting among them with Zagreus' laurel on his head.

"Is he...?" Thanatos peered closer, then took a few steps back in Hypnos' direction. "Huh. Still sleeping."

"Well. I suppose neither of us won, then."

Thanatos picked Mort up, plucking Zag's laurel off his beloved Companion and setting it back on Zag's head instead. Crooked. Probably crooked on purpose. "Yep. I'd say this one's a tie, Zag."

Hypnos finally yawned, waking of his own accord. "Wait, who put all these books here?"

"Run?" Zagreus suggested.

Thanatos shrugged. "He's not gonna mind. But sure."

Running always made it more fun, anyways.

— — —

Long gone were the days when the House of Hades was disturbed by a pair of children running races through the Great Hall or trying to bother

Cerberus while he slept. After all, Zagreus and Thanatos were both older, more mature, and no longer had time for such childish activities.

That, and they'd realized it was more fun when they didn't get caught and lectured.

Nobody ever had any reason to be up in the rafters of the House, except maybe for Dusa, when she was cleaning. It was a fun challenge, Zagreus had discovered, to clamber up one of the massive columns that surrounded the halls and into the rafters, and he liked sitting up there, even if the roof wasn't very entertaining to look at.

It was much more fun when Thanatos was around, and they could turn rafter-climbing into one of their little games.

"Whoever can get up the pillar and all the way across until you're above the door to Father's chambers wins," Zagreus had stipulated when this contest began. "No teleporting. It really is cheating, this time."

"Have you still not gotten over that?"

Zagreus responded by sticking his tongue out at Thanatos and starting his climb, slowing just a second to watch Thanatos scramble after him. Not to let Than catch up. Of course not.

Zagreus was naturally a better climber than Thanatos, because Thanatos preferred to float everywhere and was thus unpracticed, and so he was the first one to grab hold of one of the rafters. Thanatos wasn't far behind, though, and he had just as much upper body strength as Zagreus, so he pulled himself up onto the rafter quickly enough to nearly catch up to Zagreus.

The rafters were spaced a good distance apart, but Zagreus knew from experience that he could jump them, although he often landed badly, just barely clinging to the next wooden beam. It was reckless, sure, but Zag was also functionally immortal. He'd be fine.

Thanatos was nimbler than he was, which made him a dangerously good competitor. Zagreus couldn't tell if he was using magic to steady himself, or if his balance was just that good, as he landed catlike on the next rafter. He barely even checked the distance before leaping again. Zagreus was going to have to start moving faster if he wanted to win—Thanatos was already halfway to Achilles' post.

It was only a matter of time before Zagreus managed a terrible landing and got the wind knocked straight out of him as the beam intersected with his stomach, dragging an *oof* out of him that made Thanatos turn around for a half-second. Zagreus hauled himself back up, only steadied himself for a moment, and made his next three bounds with relative ease, almost catching up with Than.

While Thanatos still moved fast, he was stopping longer between leaps now, as if judging the distance even though the space between beams was always the same. Zagreus was nearly caught up when Thanatos next steadied himself. If he made the next two jumps fast enough, he'd win for sure.

On the first, he wobbled, and he normally would have taken time to regain his balance, but Thanatos was about to jump again, and Zagreus *couldn't* let him get ahead.

He sprung forward, and he missed.

Hugely.

Zagreus may have been functionally immortal, but the sick lurch in his stomach as he dropped made him fear the end of the fall just as much as he imagined a mortal wound. He barely even noticed the flash of green.

The collision was rough, and made one of the antique amphoras on the pedestals outside his father's bedchamber rock ominously on its perch, but it didn't end with Zagreus walking out of the Styx. Somehow.

The reason for this, as he soon realized, was that Thanatos had blinked from his perch to the ground directly below Zagreus, and had caught him before

he ever had a chance to make impact with the ground. Even now, Thanatos was carrying Zagreus with one arm around his back and the other looped under his knees, like Zagreus was a maiden being carried off by her noble rescuer.

Which was, of course, ridiculous, and definitely not the reason Zagreus' face was going red.

"I... um..."

Thanatos set him down abruptly, holding onto him for just a second longer to make sure Zagreus didn't fall over again. He cleared his throat, but didn't say anything after.

"Thank you," Zagreus was a little shaky on his feet even though he'd landed otherwise unscathed.

"No need. I wasn't about to let you fall." Thanatos, Zagreus now realized, had started waiting for longer spans of time between leaps just after Zagreus first stumbled. He'd *wanted* the race to be neck-and-neck, so that he could be there. To catch Zagreus.

That thought made Zagreus even weaker in the knees than his near-(temporary)-death experience had.

Thanatos interrupted Zag's stunned silence. "Does this mean I won?"

"What? No!"

"I think it does," Thanatos said, mischief curling the corners of his mouth just the slightest bit.

It may have, Zagreus thought, but he'd never admit it.

— — —

It was a simple enough contest, Zagreus supposed. It would have been fair, if Zag wasn't midway through what had to be his thirtieth attempt at

escaping this place, already in awful shape, and by no means equipped to compete with Thanatos.

Oh, who was he even kidding? Had he come freshly healed from the nearest fountain and equipped with all the most powerful boons of the Olympians, he still wouldn't have beat Thanatos in this little competition. Zagreus' focus was fading, his mind was miles away, and Thanatos' words would not stop ringing in his head, along with the sweep of his scythe through the air as it took out scores of Zagreus' enemies.

*"You left, without so much as telling me good-bye."*

A chariot raced at Zagreus, about to run him down when it was efficiently cut out of the way by Thanatos, who looked as steady and unruffled as always, not even a single hair out of place as he dispatched more than half Zagreus' enemies without batting an eye.

*"I suppose you knew I'd catch up with you sooner or later."*

Zagreus finally managed to get in a hit, but taking down a single soul felt less than impressive when Thanatos' sigil lit up the ground and destroyed everything within its path.

*"Is that it? No escaping death, and all?"*

He turned, readying his spear again, but realized there were no more enemies around to fight. The boon he had been promised rested in the center of the room, giving off a soft glow, but Zagreus ignored it, racing toward Thanatos, who was still drifting near the far corner.

Than was gone before Zagreus could convince him to stay—he was beginning to suspect it was impossible to convince Thanatos not to teleport out of any given situation—and Zag was left staring at the spot where he'd been, as the green light that signaled Than's arrivals and disappearances faded from his eyes. He'd been right there. Zagreus could have reached out and touched him. Suddenly 'I thought of you and hoped you'd understand' didn't feel like enough.

He had to keep going. If he didn't get out, if he didn't succeed, then all of this, including all the ways he had hurt Thanatos, would be for nothing.

Zagreus rolled his shoulders, trying to ease some of the soreness that had been beaten into him after he'd fought the Minotaur one-on-one a couple chambers ago. Despite it all, even despite the pang of guilt at the look Thanatos had fixed him with before disappearing, there was a spark of joy within Zagreus. If Thanatos truly hated him, he would have left Zagreus to his own demise. He wouldn't have stepped in to assist.

He wouldn't have challenged Zagreus to a contest.

There was something in their childhood playfulness in those moments, fighting alongside one another, keeping score. Even if Zagreus lost, he didn't mind entirely, only hoped that Thanatos would be willing to go another round.

That hope burned within him every time Thanatos challenged him, up until Zagreus realized he had no fear of it being extinguished.

Thanatos would always be up for the challenge.

— — —

"I hope you were keeping count this time, because I wasn't."

Zagreus wasn't quite as beaten to a pulp as he'd been the last few times Than had shown up in Elysium to give him a hand and issue yet another challenge, but he still had to lean on his sword and catch his breath after. He'd taken a pretty bad blow from Lernie, who'd decided that just smashing him with one of her many heads was the best way to get rid of him, and even the fountain between Asphodel and Elysium hadn't been enough to cure him completely.

"Unfortunately, I was," Thanatos said, his scythe disappearing as he floated down to Zagreus' side, "and I lost. So, here."



The centaur heart Than offered him was enough to have him back in near-perfect shape, and he stretched, enjoying the movement he'd regained now that his wounds no longer limited him. "Thanks for that," he said, "although. Is it in the rules that I can ask for a different prize from you?"

Thanatos took a moment to respond, as if still registering Zagreus' question. He had, Zagreus realized, been distracted. By Zagreus.

Huh. He wondered if he could get the same reaction if he tried flexing on purpose next time.

"You can ask," Thanatos finally agreed, "but I might not give it to you."

Zagreus hooked his fingers in Than's belt, just to one side of the skull in the center, and used his grip to pull Thanatos down, until he was no longer hovering. He was already starting to flush a bright gold, probably remembering the last time Zagreus had pulled him in that way (in Zag's room, after Than had convinced him not to wait any longer).

Once Than was close enough, Zagreus let go of his belt and reached up to nudge the hood of Than's cloak off his head, so that he could press his cheek against Than's as he whispered, "I want a kiss."

He half-expected, "*Zag, I have to go back to work,*" half-expected Thanatos to just disappear without comment entirely. Certainly did not expect Thanatos to smile, or to rest a hand on his chest, on the side left bare.

"I'd give you one regardless of whether you'd won, you know." He leaned away from Zagreus, tossing his hair out of his eyes. "But since you asked, sure. Come here and claim your prize."

By verdict of having known him for years, Thanatos fully anticipated the way Zagreus leapt at him, and caught him without effort. Zagreus flung his arms around Than's shoulders, legs around his waist, the kind of full-body hug that Thanatos wasn't used to, but he tolerated it from Zag. Maybe even enjoyed it; he was laughing as Zagreus kissed his cheek first, then the corner of his mouth.

When their lips finally met, Thanatos clutched Zagreus closer to himself. His gauntlet dug into Zagreus' thigh, the pressure of it just on the pleasant side of painful, contrasted by the sweetness on his tongue.

Thanatos didn't have much experience with these sorts of things aside from Zagreus (he'd said as much shortly after Zag had first kissed him) but he was eager and passionate and a good deal messier with his kisses than he was with anything else. Though Zagreus had no confirmation but for his own similar feelings, he suspected this attitude was borne of years of pent-up affection. Thanatos, who loved him with equal parts gentleness and ferocity, had been *pinning* for him, for gods knew how long. He could still scarcely believe it.

Zagreus clasped the back of his neck, fingers digging into the engraved details on his gorget, wishing he could touch the bare skin underneath the cool metal. Than tipped backward until they were both floating, Zagreus supported entirely by the shape of Than's body beneath him. He could only cling tighter, his legs winding around Thanatos' to keep himself afloat. Than was steady underneath him despite his wriggling, holding tight around his waist to keep him in place.

"Ha, I should have been asking for kisses as my winnings all along," Zagreus said. "Maybe if I started doing it when we were racing around the rafters, we could have avoided a lot of unnecessary heartbreak."

Than's voice was muffled, because his mouth was currently occupied with the hollow of Zagreus' throat. "Too bad you never won, back then."

"Hey! I definitely did! At least once!" Zagreus, forgetting that they were floating a few feet above ground level, tried to grapple with Than, but it was a little difficult to start a wrestling match when there wasn't a surface around to pin somebody against.

Thanatos easily dumped Zagreus off of himself by simply rolling to the side, and Zagreus tumbled harmlessly into the thick carpet of grass, whining his complaints although he had come out unscathed.

"You know, that's a terribly rude thing to do to—agh! Than!"

Thanatos landed heavier than he needed to atop Zagreus, who was about to begin another outburst when Than stretched out overtop him and kissed him thoroughly instead, stealing any mock protest out of Zagreus' mouth.

Gods, he was getting too good at this.

Zagreus held Than in place at the back of his head—even if his hair was too short to pull, Zag could certainly muss it up. It pleased a deep part of him to know that whoever encountered Thanatos next would catch him looking like he'd been pulled to the ground and ravished in some corner of Elysium.

"Blood and darkness, take me right here." Zagreus spoke before he entirely realized what he was saying, but Thanatos seemed to like the idea, his hand sweeping up Zagreus' chest and clasping him by the back of the neck in a proprietary sort of hold.

"As much as I'd like to," he said, looking rather affected by what they'd done so far, his cheeks ichor-brights and his eyes glassy with lust. He licked his lower lip, still tasting Zagreus there. "I think you'd rather see what prize I give you if you manage to go all the way."

Such a prize could be literally anything and Zagreus would covet it desperately, because anything won from Thanatos was the most precious of gifts. And even if Theseus, or any number of vermin, or even his father managed to defeat him, he'd give Thanatos something good as his winnings.

He turned his head so that he could brush a soft kiss on the inside of Than's forearm. "See you at the House, then?"

"See you at home."

Thanatos was gone before the warmth of his parting kiss left Zagreus' lips, and Zag smiled, pulling himself to his feet.

Time to win a bet.